

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd Before the

QUEEN,

At S^T. JAMES's,

On FRIDAY the 17th Day of March, 1704.

By GEORGE STANHOPE, D.D.
Dean of Canterbury: And Chaplain in Ordinary
to Her MAJESTY.

Publsh'd by Her Majesty's Special Command.

L O N D O N:

Printed for S. Keble, R. Sare, T. Goodwin, S. Manship,
M. Wotton, and B. Tooke. MDCCIV.

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AT 2.30 PM

1707

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Dean of Durham and Chaplain in Ordinary
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St. Martin's Lane, and J. Baker, M.D.C.C.IV.

St. Matthew, Ch. VIII. Ver. 2, 3.

*Behold, there came a Leper and worshipped him,
saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make
me clean.*

*And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him,
saying, I will, be thou clean. And imme-
diately his Leprosie was cleansed.*

ST. MATTHEW, after our Bless-
ed Saviour's Sermon in the Mount,
contained in the Three Chapters be-
fore, proceeds in this, to relate some of
those mighty Miracles by which that hea-
venly Doctrine was confirm'd. Of those
my Texts relates the first, A Cure so speedy,
so miraculous, and wrought upon a Person
so fitly qualified to receive it, that we shall
find it a Subject worthy our very attentive
Consideration, in these Three following Re-
gards especially.

markable. That a Leprosie is said to pro-
ceed from a general Corruption of the
Blood.

First, The Nature of the Disease.

Secondly, The Manner of the Patient's Address for a Cure.

Thirdly, The Success he found from that Address.

But in regard great part of Mens Bodily Infirmities carry some Resemblances to the Miseries of our Souls, and the Cures wrought by our Saviour on the former are excellently contriv'd for the Benefit and Improvement of the latter; Permit me, I beseech you, to promote the Design of this Holy Season, by Contemplating the Work of Mercy now before us, so as to look on this Leper as an Emblem of our Selves; and, as I go along, to shew, What Our Disease is; How we should Imitate Him in Seeking; And by what Means we do obtain a Recovery of our Spiritual Leprosie.

I. *First then* Concerning the Disease itself, these following Circumstances are remarkable. That a Leprosie is said to proceed from a general Corruption of the Blood

Blood and Juices, to render the Person tainted with it extremely loathsome and deformed; to be (in those Countries especially) of all Distempers the most spreading in the Body, and most contagious to Others. These are Qualities inseparable from the Nature of the Disease; But, if look'd upon with regard to the Notions of the Jews, and their Law about it, thus it was of all others the most scandalous, the most detestable: It separated the Sick from all Civil as well as Religious Communion; distinguished him by all the outward Significations of Sorrow and Shame; was generally look'd on as a Plague inflicted by God for some enormous Crime, (of which Scripture furnishes several Examples) thought so far above the Power of Art, that the very Attempt to cure it by Medicine was esteemed an impious Presumption. It was dreaded as the highest of all Legal Pollutions; and required great Variety of Lustrations before the Patient could be restored to the Privileges of a Jew. Washings of his Body and Cloaths, Sprinklings of Blood, Burnt and Meat and Sin-Offerings.

Accord-

Numb. xii.
2 Kings v.
2 Chron. xxvi.
* Ader de Morb.
Evang. cap. 1.
Critic. Sac.
T. 9.
Matth xi. 5.
R. Menach on
Levit. xiii.

Ver. 2.

Ver. 3.

Accordingly the Deliverance from it is generally express'd in Terms, that import not so properly Recovery, as Purification. Thus the Leper here says not, Lord, thou canst make me whole, but thou canst make me clean; and, upon granting his Petition, it is not said his Leprosie was healed, but that it was *cleansed*. Of this Cleanness the Priests were to make Declaration: In order whereunto several Marks were appointed for the Direction of their Judgment; One of which is so very remarkable, that I shall consider it particularly by and by. Mean while, let it suffice to say, that a large Account of this whole Matter is contained in the Ordinances concerning it, at the *xiiith* and *xivth* Chapters of *Leviticus*.

Now what Leprosie was then to the Body, the same in proportion and at all times is heinous and wilful Sin to the Soul: It results from depraved Humours, a tainted Will, and inflamed Passions: It is noisom and odious in the Sight of God and Man; express'd for this Reason by *Wounds, and Bruises, and putrefying Sores*. It is rife and catching, swelling from less to greater, and
 Accord by

H. i. 5.

by a fatal Fruitfulness multiplying from one to many; wasting the Conscience, eating away the sound parts, and shedding its Venom upon as many as come within the reach of its Infection. Infomuch that the subtillest Poison, the most pestilential Vapour, does not insinuate it self more speedily, more mortally, than This. Hence every Man is warned to keep his distance, and not tempt a Danger by too free and familiar Approaches; not only to refuse his Consent, when Sinners entice him; but not to stand in their way, not to sit in the Seat of the Scornful, not to keep company with vain Persons, nor have any fellowship with the Deceitful. To consider, as the Apostle says, that every Word of Theirs eats like a Canker, loosens our Principles, dissipates our good Intentions, enters and emboldens us in Vice; that Pitch may as well be touched without defiling, and Fire taken into a Garment without burning, as Men of evil Example be frequented and delighted in, without contracting Soil and Damage from them. So applicable is that of Solomon to every one of profligate Conversation, *Their House*

Prov. i. 10.

Psal. i. 1.

xxvi. 4.

2 Tim. ii. 17.

Eccles. xiii. 1.

Prov. vi. 27.

Prov. vii. 27.

26, 27.

is the Way to Hell, and leads down to the Chambers of Death. Let not then your heart decline to their ways, and go not astray in their paths. For many strong men have been slain by this means, and who so cometh near them shall not be innocent.

So near is the Resemblance between the Leprosie of the Outward, and that of the Inner Man, with regard to its Nature and its Consequences. Each a noisom, a mortal, and a contagious Disease. Some Likeness there is too between the Christian and the Jewish Laws about it; tho' Ours by no means answer in the Rigour of the Execution.

Rom. xvi. 17.

2 Thess. iii. 6.

1 Cor. v. 11.

1 Tim. v. 20.

We are commanded to mark bad men, and those that cause divisions and offences, and to avoid them; to withdraw our selves from every disorderly walker. With a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, no not to eat; They that Sin, are to be rebuked before all, that others also may fear. And if milder Methods are thrown away upon them, to be excluded the Society and Privileges of Christians. Which, from the miraculous Scourges attending the Church's Censures in those early Days, is called,

called, delivering such over to Satan for the 1 Cor. v. 5. destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

If these Ordinances be not observed, in their due Extent of Severity, we owe the Misfortune to our own Licentiousness, and the general Corruptions of the Age, into which Providence hath reserved us. For wholsom Rules, and strict Administrations ask proper Seasons and Circumstances, to render them practicable. And Men are never more mistaken, than when they imagine, that even the best Governours can always do all that they think fit to be done, in order to a thorough Reformation. But then the Consequence of this Unhappiness in Reason ought to be, not the taking Courage in Evil doing, from such unhappy Remissness or Disability: But, the less Care the Publick is qualified to take of us, the more should every one take of himself: lament those Wants of necessary Restraint, which are not in his Superior's Power; and stop the growing Danger, by his own Private Act, which nothing from without can render ineffectual.

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The Parallel holds farther yet, in the Cure of this Disease. For, as that other Leprosie was reputed a Stroke of Divine Vengeance, not to be healed by Human Applications; so this of the Soul is an Effect of God's Wrath, when provoked to withdraw his Grace; and, in just Punishment to Mens Obstinacy, suffering them to fall from one Wickedness to another. Nor is the Recovery to be had from any other hand. The most refined Contrivances of Reason, and Schemes of Morality, and all the crafty Inventions of mercenary or superstitious Men, are broken Reeds; They may serve perhaps to skin over the Wound a little, with the Ignorant and Credulous; but the Conscience, in the meanwhile, is rather deluded than quieted. Here must be a real Cleansing too, a Sprinkling with Blood, and a Sin-Offering; that is, in the true and spiritual Sense of the Law, Repentance and Reformation, and the Sacrifice of Christ applied to the distempered Party. The Priest can declare the Man Clean, when he is so; but neither his Word, nor all he can do, will make him accepted.

accepted for Clean, when he is not so. It is the Blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all Sin; and this Remedy is left to be applied upon certain Conditions. But they who hope to obtain it otherwise, purchase to themselves only a Dream of Safety, and the Paradise of Fools. 1 Job. i. 7.

I do not forget my self to be still accountable for One Circumstance, hinted at before in the Jewish Law of Leprosie. 'Tis, Levit. xiii. 12, 13. that the Person, whose Sore came out at once, and covered his whole Body, is pronounced Clean; Whereas Others, in whom the Plague discovered it self about one, or a few Parts of the Body, are sentenced as Unclean. They, who have undertaken to explain this Law, assign Two Reasons for that Ordinance. Ainsw. Munster. Clarim. Grotius. Either, that such an universal Scab argues the Venom to have spent it self, without Detriment to the Strength and Soundness of the Patient; Or, that this Spreading proves no great Malignity ever to have been in such a Disease at all. For, as Rivers, when penn'd up in a narrow Course, are deep and strong, and eat away their Banks, to force a Channel which

they did not find; but, when enlarg'd, they glide away in shallow Streams: So this Disease, say they, when rank and fierce, enters deep, gnaws away the kindly Flesh, seizes the Vitals, and penetrates the very Bones and Marrow; but when of a more favourable and gentle kind, it diffuses and loses it self, is rather a Scurf, than a formed Leprosie; and, though some Defacing, yet escapes the Censure and Shame of the Law.

Now this Account to me appears not unfitly to figure the Condition of Mankind, in relation to Sins of Infirmary, and Sins of Presumption. The Former we are full of, and the Frailty of Humane Nature exposes us to frequent Commissions of them. The Latter, though but Few, though but One, yet if of a grievous kind, does contribute more to the Sicknefs and Danger of the Soul, to the Hardening of the Conscience, to the Scandalizing our Brethren, to the Reproach of our Religion, than the daily, hourly Failings in point of strict Duty, consequent upon the Weakness of Corrupt Nature. These do not destroy the

the Peace of our Minds, they are pitiable and excusable; incident to good People; and, provided we lament, and pray, and strive the best we can against them, they do not cut us off from Christ. But the Other give deep and deadly Wounds, because they argue a Mind violently bent, and a profligate Sense in the Person indulging them. In one case the *Righteous falls seven times a day*, and yet rises again; but in the other the deliberately *Wicked fall into Mischiefs*. The Reason is, because the Former is surpris'd, and would stand better if he could; but the Latter might stand, and will not. He sees the Precipice, and knows the Danger, and casts himself down headlong, and will not be with-held from his own Destruction. So that though Both have their Spots, yet the One is *the Spot of Children*, and the Other *the Spot of Lepers*. Concerning which having already spoken so largely, I think it time to proceed to my

II. *Second Head.* Under which I propos'd to consider, The Manner of this Leper's Address to Christ for a Cure; And,
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in Agreement to, and Purfuance of that Pattern, how it will become Us to apply for the Forgiveness of Our Sins.

1. Now in the Descriptions given of this Matter, we find, *First*, Manifest Tokens of the Man's Concern for his present Miſery, and earnest Deſires to be releas'd from it, expreſs'd by coming to meet Jeſus, and beſeeching him. Secondly, Great Reverence, in that he is ſaid here to have worſhipped him, and, in the parallel Places, to have done that in a Manner the moſt obſequious and lowly; for they tell us, he did it by kneeling down, may, and not content with that, he added Proſtration too; for S. Luke relates, that he fell on his face before him.
3. We may diſcover, *Thirdly*, A firm and undoubted Perſuaſion of Chriſt's Ability to grant his Requeſt; conſequently, that he thought his Power Divine, and that too a Power, of which he had the free Exerciſe and Diſpoſal. This Assurance is declared in Terms the moſt Significant that can be: He ſays not, If thou wilt pray to God on my behalf, he will hear thee and cleanſe me; but, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canſt make

Mark i. 40.
Luke v. 12.

me clean. The Difficulty that appeared to him, was not, Whether Christ had so great a Power as this came to, but whether he would condescend to exert it upon His Account. And therefore, in great Humility, which is the *Fourth* Qualification remarkable in this Address, he recommends the Matter to his Consideration; as being satisfied, that he was Master of his own Favours, and best knew when to grant, and when to refuse. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* Thus not pressing his Petition with an indecent and clamorous Importunity, but referring himself entirely to his Wisdom and Goodness, to determine what should become of It and Him.

In proportion to the several parts of this Example, it is necessary,

I. *First*, That Forgiveness should be a Blessing of our own Seeking, and that it be sought in a very affectionate and importunate manner too. We are not to imagine, God will thrust this Favour upon us; He hath already shewed himself Gracious and Condescending even to Astonishment, in ordaining.

ordaining such Methods for our Redemption, in *providing himself a Lamb*, the Son of his Love, *who takes away the Sin of the World by the Sacrifice of his own Blood*. He hath brought Salvation home to our Doors, published a Gospel of Reconciliation and Peace, used all Inducements and Endearments, possible for a Rational Creature to be acted upon by, to reclaim, to wooe, to win us, to gain our Acceptance of our own Happiness. And all the part left Us, is to be prevailed upon to accept. But then we must accept, as becomes such a Gift; with great Thankfulness and godly Zeal. The Condition is, *Ask, and ye shall have*; and pray remember, this is a Condition propounded not only to Creatures, but Criminals. Criminals, convict not only by the Laws, which Interest as well as Duty bound them to obey, but by the sad Reproaches of their own guilty Consciences. *quoniam has sententia est visum et iudicatum*
 If this then be the Case of You, and Me, and every Man breathing, let us turn our Eyes upon the wretched Malefactors, on whom Verdict and Sentence are passing,
quoniam and

and see what Nature and Love of Life prompt them to do. Look upon their Tears, listen to their piercing Cries and Groans, observe the bended Knees and wringing Hands, their doleful Accents and vehement Obtestations: and let us learn from These at once to beg, and how to beg a Pardon. Imitate at least their Sorrows, and their Supplications; be not fullen and impenetrable, but remember thou hast a Judge armed with Thunder to deal with: Consider, thy Offences are more and greater, the Sentence due to Thee more dreadful, the Punishment more insupportable; the Chain of thy Sins, wherewith thou art tied and bound, a heavier Load, than any Irons of an Earthly Malefactor. Let not then Nature out-do Reason and Grace. Let not a short perishing Life excite stronger Passions than a future and eternal One. Let not the Pains of a Moment, and the Scandal of a Gibbet, be deprecated with more moving Concern, than the Torments of Hell and *everlasting Shame and Contempt*. A Deliverance from These deserves all thy Application; if These be not averted, thou

art undone for ever: They hang over thy Head, and cannot be averted but by Prayer; by coming with this Leper, and worshipping, and beseeching; O kiss the Son therefore lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way. Ye have already kindled his wrath, O serve and approach him with Reverence: Which is the

Matth. viii. 2.
Mark i. 40.
Luke v. 12.

2. Second Qualification, taken notice of in this Address to our Blessed Lord, and expressed by this Person's worshipping, kneeling down, and falling on his face before Christ. Now these are Bodily Actions, meant for so many Significations of a Mind full of Respect: And, in truth, such outward Testimonies of Zeal are so far from needing to be proved lawful, that they in a manner prove themselves necessary. For it is so natural with the Body, to conform it self to the present Posture of the Soul, when the Impressions there are at all vigorous and lively; that every Part does, as it were Mechanically, conspire to speak the Resentments within. The Tongue by Speech, the Countenance by its Air and Form, and every

every Limb by Gestures, suited to its Capacity and the present Occasion. So that They, who cry down, or are manifestly void of such Outward Signs of Devotion, stand in need of all our Charity, to believe that their Spirits are so sensibly, so powerfully affected within, as they would have us think them. We can discern the same Impressions of Joy and Grief, and Love and Fear, in common cases, upon these Men, as upon our Selves, or other People. Why should they then remain to all Appearance unmoved and stupid, in Occasions of infinitely higher Concern to them? Why should not Grace, and the so much boasted Spirit, provoke the same Demonstrations of an inward Affection, that Nature plainly does? This sure is very hard to conceive; And harder yet it is to say, why those Bodies, which share in the Redemption, should not come in for a share of the Devotions that seek it. Away, my Brethren, away with such senseless Irreverence: How can ye sit so Cold, so seemingly void of Thought, when the Church is begging That upon which your All depends? How can you expect God

will grant a Blessing, for which you shew no manner of Sollicitude? Would you behave your selves so unconcernedly before an Earthly Judge? If therefore no Marks of Respect or Passion would be esteem'd too much for such a Tribunal, do, I beseech you, as our Admirable Liturgy exhorts you every Day to do, and as the Leper here sets you a Pattern, *O come, and worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord your Maker.*

Psal. xiv. 6.

3. As little Question can there be made, *Thirdly*, Whether we be not obliged to copy after this Example, in a firm Assurance of Christ's Ability to heal us, and saying from the Heart, *Lord, thou canst make me clean.* Which, so far as relates to the Matter now in hand, is Relying entirely upon his Meritorious Sufferings; acknowledging, that he hath made ample Satisfaction to the Divine Justice on our Behalf: and believing the Efficacy of his Sacrifice, to as many as shall put themselves under the Conditions, appointed for being purged and absolved by it. For this Trust is the proper

per Foundation of all our Prayers. He that confesses himself a Sinner, does, in that very Act, proclaim his Misery, disavow all Desert, all that can incline God to love or favour him for his own Sake. He stands condemned out of his own Mouth, as One to whom the Extremity of Vengeance is justly due; and declares, that, if Salvation be attained, this must be owing to some Other hand. And since God hath given *no other Name in Heaven or Earth, by* Acts iv. 12. *which Men may be saved, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ;* He who reposes not his Confidence in Him alone, can have no Reasonable Encouragement to ask or expect Remission of Sins.

4. But, in regard we have been taught by the first Elements of our Religion, that the *Sacraments are ordained by Christ himself,* Church Catech. *as Means generally necessary to Salvation;* and, that one necessary Predisposition to the Worthy Partaking of these Sacraments, is a lively Faith in God's Mercy through Christ; there may perhaps seem some Ground for questioning, whether we ought, whether it be allowed.

allowed us indeed, to imitate this Leper's Petition, in the Last thing observed; or express our Selves in Terms so full of Doubt and Diffidence, as, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* My Meaning is, Whether the Faith in God's Mercy, required from us, do not imply a full Assurance, not only that he can, but that he most certainly will, hear, and forgive, and cleanse us.

Now, for our Satisfaction in this Point, we need only examine, what is the proper and genuine Importance of that Expression in the Case before us. This Leper must in Reason be supposed to have formed his Persuasion of Christ's Ability to help him, by the Sight, or the Fame, of some former Miraculous Cures. But the same Miracles were Instances of Mercy too, and must have created an Opinion of his Goodness as well as his Power. I say, they must have done so: Because we know, from constant Experience, and the Nature of the Thing, that either of these Qualities, single and apart, is not an adequate Encouragement for our Requests. If we be fully satisfied of a Friend's Good Wishes and kind Intentions, bewolls
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but sensible withal, that, though *him* he would, yet he cannot give us the Assistance we want, we spare our Selves and Him the Trouble of an Application. If, on the other hand, we know the Power of an Enemy, or a Stranger, to Relieve us, we either ask it not at all; or not, till by employing proper Instruments, we have prepared the Way to his Affection, and disposed him to employ that Power in our Interests. The Preferring of every Petition then proves, that we hope, and think, that neither Ability nor Inclination to grant is wanting in the Person addressed to. And, if the Leper here spoke in a sort of desponding Strain, this does not argue, that he distrusted Christ's Beneficence in general, (which had he done, he had not asked at all) but that he feared his own Unworthiness to partake of that Beneficence in particular. And so these Words express, not the Weakness of his Faith, but the Greatness of his Humility.

In like manner are We too enjoined to believe God's Mercy through Christ; that he will spare those who confess their Faults, and
 01 *restore.*

restore them that are penitent; for, without this Persuasion, we should be destitute of any Ground, any Rational Motive, to Pray, or to Repent at all. But we may notwithstanding very justly doubt, whether we confess our Faults as we should do, at the same time that we rest perfectly assured God will not fail to spare us, if we do so. And the Belief, that we shall be restored upon sincere and effectual Repentance, does not by any means infer a Certainty, that our own Repentance is effectual and sincere. The First is a General Truth, built upon plain and uncontrollable Revelation, upon solemn, repeated, and inviolable Promises: and to disbelieve This, is to dispute the Justice and Fidelity of God who cannot Lye. But, whether that General Truth be applicable to Our Particular Case, whether we be such manner of Persons as have a Title to those Promises; this Second is a new, and very distinct Enquiry from the Former. This depends upon a thousand Circumstances, relating to the present State of our Souls, to the constant Tenure of our Lives: and the doubting of This, is only
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to doubt and fear our own Selves, who may be, and it is but too plain, are Creatures exceeding frail, and fickle, and fallible. To say all in One Word: To question, whether God will forgive Sinners, is to question whether he will be as good as his Word, though we perform the Condition required; and this is a Sin, a dishonourable Reflection upon Him, and a Fundamental Error in Religion. But to question, whether he will forgive You, or Me, or any other determinate Sinner, is only to question, whether You, or I, or that Person, have performed the Condition, and so be duly qualified for Forgiveness, according to the Terms upon which it is promised. And this sure is a Doubt, that many times may be very just, very useful, and very commendable.

For who is there indeed among us all, the most circumspect, the most devout, the best disposed of Christians though he be; without Occasion for such a Check from within, such an Opinion of his own Unworthiness? Which of us can look back, I do not say upon his Faults, (those are a black and
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ghastly Sight indeed) but even upon his Acts of Devotion, and Penitence, and Turning to God, without a secret Shame, and sensible Regret? How many sad Relapses into Sin, How many feeble Resolutions, How many broken Sacramental Vows does even this best and most comfortable Prospect of our Lives, presently alarm us with? And how are we secure, that those of this, or any other Day, shall be more firm, and more successful, than the past? And if so, how can we forbid them, who so oft have been deceived in themselves, still to go on in fearing and suspecting themselves? In truth, how can we answer it, should we forbear exhorting and conjuring them so to do? That such a Holy Jealousie may awaken their Care, that the Remembrance of their former Failings may render them more watchful over their own treacherous Hearts, more prudent in the midst of Snares and Temptations, more strictly conscientious to strengthen, to recollect, to charge themselves home with their Promises of better Obedience for the Time to come: Especially, that a becoming Diffidence in their
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own very poor Performances, may effectually conduce to their Humiliation, and clip the Wings of that Security and Spiritual Pride, which, of all other Vices, most obstructs our Improvement in Vertue, and our Acceptance with God. For the Humble are his Delight; and these will never think their Piety disparaged, by praying in the modest Words and Meaning of this bashful Leper, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

III. And those that pray with the same Disposition, he not only can, but will make clean. For my Third and Last Head consists of the Success this Petitioner found, and the Methods of his Recovery, in those Words, *Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his Leprosie was cleansed.* From whence I only beg you to observe the Readiness of our Dear Redeemer to shew Mercy, The Efficacy of such fervent Prayers to procure it, The Suddenness and the Perfection of the Cure. And as easie, as powerful, as speedy will our Spiritual Recoveries

Ver. 3.

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ries be, provided we prepare our Hearts, and be equally fitted for that Mercy, which only waits a Disposition in us proper to receive it. Once more, I cannot but take notice of our Blessed Lord's Marvellous and most Amazing Condescension, who, though able to have healed with speaking the Word only, yet disdained not to touch the poor polluted Wretch. Even so scorn not our polluted Hearts, O Meek and Gracious Saviour, but touch them in much Mercy and Power, though deformed with the Leprosie of Sin, and defiled with long and manifold Uncleannels. Put forth not thy Hand only, but the Renewing Graces of thy Holy Spirit. O enter into us, dwell with us, and reign in and over us, that we may also live and reign with Thee for ever. And since, till that blessed Time come, we must be content to continue liable to many Weaknesses and great Temptations, hear, we beseech Thee, the Petitions of thy Church, That thou wouldst deal with Us as with this Happy Leper; *Mercifully look upon our Infirmities, and in all our Dangers and Necessities stretch forth thy Right Hand to help and defend us, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

FINIS.